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VIEWERS' PERCEPTIONS OF TELEVISION COMMERCIALS' INFLUENCE
MESSAGE APPEALS, PRODUCT COMMERCIALS AND SELF-REPORTED
LOCUS OF CONTROL

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Interdisciplinary Studies:
Integrated Marketing Communication

by
Alan Bruce Satzger
September 2001

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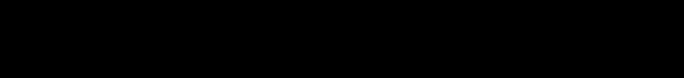
by
Alan Bruce Satzger
September 2001

Approved by:


Kevin Lamude, Ph.D., Chair, Communication

9/4/01
Date


Nabil Razzouk, Ph.D., Chair, Marketing


Donna Simmons, Ph.D., Communication

ABSTRACT

In this study linkages between television viewers' perceived locus of control, message appeals in commercials, and types of commercial product were studied within the context of household television use. The data were gathered from 105 college students. Results indicated viewers reported as internals are more influenced by value-based messages appeals in commercials, whereas, viewers reported as externals are more influenced by consequence-based message appeals regardless of type of product commercial. The usefulness of the Wheelless, Barraclough, and Stewart (1983) influence framework is emphasized.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Although some attention has been given to assessing the relationship between certain consumers in a household and television viewing commercial decisions, research on message appeals in television commercials and viewer psychological antecedent characteristics is relatively sparse (Singh & Cole, 1993). This is particularly true for the impact of individual control orientation and types of commercial message appeals. This study sought to ascertain to what extent television commercial persuasive message appeals discriminant as a function of viewer self-reported locus of control and commercial product categories.

In a parity marketplace, many integrated marketing communication researchers suggest, the only differentiating feature left to marketers is "relationship marketing" or two-way communication (Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn, 1993). This means that the marketer and his or her consumers are involved in an exchange of information. Several integrated marketing communication researchers (Gronstedt & Thorson, 1996) have emphasized to accomplish this, the marketer must first know what information the consumer, or prospect has. Following this line of thought,

Aaker and Stayman (1990), suggest understanding the relationship between advertising message appeals and consumers, and or prospects characteristics are essential to understanding effective integrated marketing communication. Although numerous studies have investigated message appeals and endorsers in advertisements, little is know about their relationship to consumer, or prospect characteristics. Given this limitation, there is a need for research into characteristics of the target of television commercial influence that may have an impact on the nature of television commercials influence activity. According to Wheelless, Barraclogh and Stewart (1983), the success of an influence attempt is determined in part by the perceived locus of control of the target.

Locus of Control

The construct locus of control is perhaps the most influential concept in contemporary psychology (Lefcourt, 1982). Grounded in Social Learning theory (Rotter, 1972), locus of control is a construct that distinguished people on the basis of perceived control of behavior and refers to one's generalized expectancies regarding behavior-reinforcement contingencies (Goodstadt & Hejelle, 1993). The concept holds that individuals, through a

lifetime of social learning, acquire a generalized expectation about the source of reinforcement for their actions. Rotter (1972) argued that expectancies following reinforcement "appear to vary systematically, depending on the nature of the situation and also as a consistent characteristic of the particular person who was being reinforced" (p. 266). According to the locus of control construct, people have generalized expectancies concerning their abilities to influence behavior. Consequently, they select situations compatible with the outcomes of their previous experiences and their perceived abilities, and they make behavioral decisions in which there is perceived agreement between situational preference, competency, and desire for goal attainment. Since tactics of influence research has adopted situational message strategies as its focal point, locus of control appears to be particularly appealing to the study of individual differences in tactics of influence research because the construct provides an understanding of how individuals, as cognitive information processors, develop information that reflects situational preferences and perceived abilities about exercising influence (Berger, 1985).

In social learning terms, the construct perceived control is referred to as a generalized expectancy of

internal or external control of situations of reinforcement (Lefcourt, 1982). There are three determinants of perceived control potential in social learning theory: expectancies, reinforcements, and psychological situations. As Rotter (1972) explained, "the potential for a behavior to occur in any specific psychological situation is a function of the expectancy that the behavior will lead to reinforcement in that situation" (p. 267). In Rotter's work, generalized expectancies develop from positive or negative reinforcement experiences in specific or similar situations. The individual's goals and purposes of past or similar situations determine the value of these reinforcement experiences for evaluating situational knowledge. Psychology situations include the individual's assessment of alternative behaviors available in a situation based on generalized expectancies and reinforcement values. Rotter (1972) argued that possessing this situational knowledge enables individuals to selectively enter into goal-oriented situations in which reinforcement is perceived to be under their control or to avoid situations where reinforcement is outside their control.

In sum, Locus of control is a construct that distinguishes people on the basis of perceived control of behavior and distinguishes between internals and externals. Developed within the context of social learning theory, the concept of personal locus of control concerns a tendency to attribute causes of events to factors inside the individual or to factors in the surrounding environment (Rotter, 1966). Thus, internal individuals tend to perceive events as following their actions while external individuals tend to perceive events as not being entirely contingent upon his or her own action but the result of chance, fate, or under the control of powerful others and unpredictable because of the complexity of forces surrounding the individual (Spector, 1982). Given this distinction, locus of control appears to be an important individual influence-related concept that may explain some of the perceived differences in television commercials message appeal activity in the present study.

Tactics of Influence

Tactical influence studies are an "outgrowth" of the Marwell and Schmitt (1967) work on compliance-gaining power strategies (Berger, 1985). Wheelless, Barraclough, and Stewart (1983) define tactical influence behavior as

"communication behavior in which an agent engages so as to elicit from a target some agent selected behavior"

(p. 111). The reasons for the development of this approach are primarily twofold: First, researchers have argued for an expanded view of the persuasion or influence process to include consumer message appeals communication; and second, prior research generally conformed to a variable-analytic model (Littlejohn, 1998) and sought to identify the conditions that provide the potential for influencing others. Consequently, as Wheelless and his associates (1983) noted, the communication messages intervening between input variables (e.g., source's power bases) and output variables (e.g., satisfaction) were largely ignored.

The defining characteristic of tactical influence research is that the focus is on the communication message appeals rather than traditional antecedent factors (e.g., power bases). In a general sense, influence message tactics call the target's attention to the agent's power. Further, tactical influence scholarship assumes that different message tactics are chosen in different types of situations (Cody & McLaughlin, 1985).

Wheelless et al., (1983) proposed a useful way to distinguish tactics of influence for internals and

externals. Drawing on influence categories isolated by several researchers (Etzioni, 1961; French & Raven, 1959; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), Wheelless et al., (1983) proposed a framework of three broad categories of influence: (a) previewing expectancies/or consequences associated with behavior, (b) invoking relationships and/or identification to elicit behavior, and(c) summoning of values and/or obligations to gain influence. The expectancy and/or consequence category would be apparent when the agent of influence used rewarding or coercive-based tactics (e.g., promise or threat tactics) to signal what is expected or the consequences of influence-noninfluence. In contrast, the relationship and/or identification category would rely on referent or expert power-based tactics (e.g., ingratiation or esteem tactics) that indicate a target's respect already gained or competence. On the other hand, a person would utilize the values and/or obligations category to exercise legitimate or personal commitments tactics (e.g., inspirational appeals or debt) that indicate concerns for target's self-fulfillment or duty to comply with the request.

The Wheelless et al. (1983) model proposes that internals are likely to be persuaded by television commercials with perceived value-based and

relationship-based message appeals. These researchers reason that the internal individual tends to influence and be influenced by "more mild and personal means for exerting influence because they expect to be successful at it" (p.135). In contrast, these researchers noted that external individuals are likely to be influenced by television commercials employing expectancy/consequence-based message appeals because of their perceived of powerful others. These speculations have resulted in the following research question:

RQ1: Do individuals in household television viewing of commercials discriminate their perception of expectancy, relationship, and value-based commercial message appeals as a function of internal-external orientation?

Internal-external orientations may provide an underlying explanation of how certain commercial viewers' in a household are influenced by certain message appeals. In turn, a number of researchers have indicated that there is a relationship between message appeals and type of commercial product advertised (Shimp, 2000; Schultz & Wang, 1992). Thus, internal-external individuals may vary perception of television commercial message appeals as a function

of product category (Cheng, 1998). Therefore, the following research question was generated:

RQ2: Do internal-external individuals in household commercial television viewing situations discriminate their perception of expectancy, relationship, and value-based message appeals as a function of the commercial product category?

CHAPTER TWO

METHOD

Students in introductory communication classes were pre-selected on the basis of their score on an abbreviated version of Rotter's (1966) Locus of Control Scale (Andrisani & Nestel, 1975). The scale consists of 12 items in a forced-choice format. Scores are calculated by summing the total number of externally oriented responses for each pair. Thus, scores range from 0-12 with low scores representing internality and high scores externality. Kuder-Richardson (K-21) internal consistency reliability estimate was .728 for the present study.

Participation in the testing was a course requirement. Fifty-five externally controlled subjects were selected from the top quartile (scores of 10 or above) of the distribution obtained from mass testing, while fifty-five internally controlled subjects were selected from the bottom quartile (scores of 3 or less). A total of 110 questionnaires were employed initially, and five of those were eliminated as non-usable responses (n = 105). All subsequent findings are based on this data.

In addition, the Marwell and Schmitt (1967) scale was used to assess respondents tactics of influence. This

measure, which is widely used as a measure of adult learners influence activity, possesses adequate reliability and validity. The measure was assumed to represent 16 relatively independent categories and labels of tactics were omitted from the questionnaire. The internal consistency reliability estimate for this scale was .84.

Procedures

Respondents were provided with four television commercial product categories (food and drink, household appliances, medicine, and personal care and fashion). These categories were chosen because they are illustrative of the most frequently viewed type of television commercials (Cheng, 1998) rating scheme, and asked to recall a television advertisement in the last month for each category in which they attempted to persuade a household member on television viewing. Message appeals were assessed by providing the respondents with a general description of each of the sixteen tactics for each commercial product category (Appendix A).

Analysis

Stepwise multiple discriminant analyses were performed on the entire sample, with the

16-compliance-gaining strategies (Research Question 1) and the four commercial product categories (Research Question 2) as independent variables and respondents' internal-external locus of control as the dependent variable. Multiple discriminant analysis forms a linear combination of discriminating variables and generates weights for each, such that the multivariate combination (discriminant function) provides maximum differentiation among levels of the dependent variable (Tatsuoka, 1971). The stepwise selection criteria used was Mahalanobis distance, in which the variable that maximizes the distance between the two closest groups is selected. In addition, the canonical discriminant functions were rotated, using varimax criterion and Kaiser's normalization, to improve their interpretation.

CHAPTER THREE

RESULTS

The results presented in Table 1 indicated that respondents in the sample rated the promise (mean = 2.58), direct request (mean = 2.51), threat (mean = 2.48) and moral appeal (mean = 2.49) as the most frequently viewed commercial appeals while the positive self-feeling (mean = 1.32), aversive stimulation (mean = 1.64), altruism (mean = 1.77), and negative self-feeling (mean = 1.79) were the least frequently viewed commercial appeals. These descriptive results say nothing, however, about the relationship between the viewers locus of control and commercial influence message appeals.

The first research question focused on whether viewers' discriminate television commercial message appeals as a function of their internal-external orientations. To answer this question, composite scores (across all 4 commercial product categories) was conducted. Discriminant analysis (Wilk's Lamda = .18; $\chi^2 = 223.87$; $p < .05$) revealed internals perceived greater use of value-based messages (pregiving, positive personal appeals, and inspirational appeals) than expectancy-based (positive expertise) and relationship-based (positive

esteem) messages were more persuasive regardless of the commercial product category. In turn, externally oriented individuals were significantly more likely to be influenced by consequence-based messages (threat, aversive stimulation) and relationship and value-based messages with negative connotations (negative personal appeals, negative altercasting) in these same commercial product categories.

Table 1.

Means, and Standard Deviations for Tactics Influencing Television Commercial Viewers'

Tactics	M	SD
Promise	2.58	1.26
Threat	2.48	1.23
Liking	1.99	1.09
Pregiving	2.29	1.08
Aversive Stimulation	1.64	.93
Debt	1.94	1.12
Moral Appeal	2.49	1.22
Positive Self Feeling	1.32	.75
Altruism	1.77	.99
Positive Esteem	2.02	1.20
Negative Esteem	2.17	1.16
Negative Self-Feeling	1.79	.98
Altercasting	2.31	1.26
Direct Request	2.51	1.24
Positive Expertise	2.05	1.18
Negative Expertise	2.27	1.44

To examine how respondents' discriminate between self-reported internal-external control orientation in each product commercial category a discriminant analysis was performed for each category employing the sixteen influence tactics as predictors of membership in the two locus of control groupings.

The discriminant analysis for the food and drink product category produced a significant function (Wilk's $\Lambda = .14$; $\chi^2 = 190.91$; $p < .01$) which had an eigenvalue of 6.01 and a canonical correlation of .93. Specifically, internally oriented persuasive discriminators were positive and negative personal appeals, pre-giving, promise, inspirational appeal, positive expertise and positive esteem message appeals. In turn, externally inclined respondent persuasive discriminators were negative personal appeal, aversive stimulation, and threat message appeals.

The discriminant analysis for the household appliances product category produced a significant function (Wilk's $\Lambda = .13$; $\chi^2 = 200.79$; $p < .05$) which had an eigenvalue of 6.60 and a canonical correlation of .93. In particular, internally inclined respondent persuasive discriminators were altruism, promise, ingratiation, positive personal appeals and pre-giving

messages. In turn, the external respondent persuasive discriminators were aversive stimulation, threat and, debt messages. The discriminant analysis for the medicine product category produced a significant function (Wilk's Lamda = .25; $\chi^2 = 134.97$; $p < .05$) which had an eigenvalue of 2.94 and a canonical correlation of .86. Specifically, internal respondents' persuasive discriminators were pregiving, promise, expertise, inspirational appeal, positive personal appeals and altruism message appeals. In turn, external persuasive discriminators were negative self-esteem, aversive stimulation and positive altercasting message appeals.

The discriminant analysis for the personal care and fashion product category produced a significant discriminant function (Wilk's Lamda = .20; $\chi^2 = 152.22$; $p < .05$) which had an eigenvalue of 3.88 and a canonical correlation of .89. Specifically, internals' persuasive discriminators were pregiving, ingratiation, debt, inspirational appeals, positive personal appeals and, negative altercasting. Message appeals. In turn, external persuasive discriminators were negative esteem, negative and positive expertise, negative altercasting, threat and, aversive stimulation message appeals.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that: (1) externally oriented television viewers' perceive themselves persuaded significantly more by commercials using pressure message appeals regardless of commercial product category; (2) Internally oriented viewers perceive themselves persuaded more by message appeals in general, and value-based commercial messages in particular, across these same commercial product categories. These findings are consistent with the locus of control literature in other contexts and suggest locus of control may be an important factor associated with television commercial message appeals.

The study also found support for the association between viewer locus of control and the four commercial product categories. However, these results suggest some basic similarities, regardless of the specific type of commercial product category. That is, internals are more inclined to select value-based message appeals, whereas externals are more inclined to select consequence message appeals regardless of commercial product category. One explanation for this finding is that respondents may have

perceived the four commercial product typology employed in this study as too general and not mutually exclusive. Alternatively, this study did not provide specific product or brand examples. Consequently, future research efforts should further explore the association between viewer locus of control and commercial message appeals using extended product or brand typologies.

There are several limitations with this study. Specifically, the number of commercial product categories examined is limited in scope. Future researchers should examine the impact of other commercial product categories. For example, consumer value researchers have observed the frequencies of ethnicity-based value messages in cars and motorcycles, services and industrial product commercials (Pollay & Gallagher, 1990). Another limitation of the study is the potential for self-report biases as a result of the methodology used for gathering data. However, the study design attempted to decrease the likelihood of such biases because: (1) the respondents, who had all volunteered to take part in this investigation, were informed ahead of time that the information would be treated anonymously; (2) the selection of negative tactics decreased the likelihood of social desirability. This study contributes to the IMC and television commercial

influence literature in several ways. First, it has extended past research on viewer influence characteristics by investigating the impact of influence behavior on viewer locus of control. Second, it has demonstrated that the relationship between viewer locus of control and commercial tactics of influence are different and may vary with type of television product commercial. Additional research is needed to investigate the relationships of locus of control and other viewing variables. Such investigations could lead to a more complete understanding of the impact of locus of control on television product commercials.

;

APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is concerned with your behavior and your perception of messages in television commercials. The answers will provide information about the appeals of television advertisements and will direct practical application in television media effects and commercial enrichment programs. Your responses will be used for the purposes of research only. All responses will be kept confidential and anonymous, so please do not sign your name.

In Part 1 of the questionnaire, you will find two statements (A and B) for each item number. This scale requires you to make judgment as to whether statement A or statement B best describes your feelings. There are no right or wrong answers to these statements. Please indicate (x) which statement for each items best describes your feelings.

1. ___ A. I feel like what happens in my life is mostly determined by powerful others.
___ B. I feel I have complete control of my life experiences.
2. ___ A. Many of the misfortunes I encounter in my life are mainly due to bad luck.
___ B. I feel I can control any problems I have in life.
3. ___ A. Getting a good job depends mainly on being in the right place at the right time.
___ B. Hard work, and appropriate training is paramount to finding a career oriented position.
4. ___ A. Sometimes I feel that I don't have enough control over the things that happen to me.
___ B. I always feel I am in complete control in any situation.
5. ___ A. Many times I feel that I have little influence over the things that happen to me.
___ B. What happens to me in life is a consequence of my own behavior.
6. ___ A. Unfortunately, an individual's worth often passes unrecognized no matter how hard he/she tries.
___ B. Hard work and achievement will always be recognized by others.
7. ___ A. It is not always wise to plan too far ahead because many times we might just as well decide what to do by flipping a coin.
___ B. I always organize and plan my behaviors.
8. ___ A. No matter how hard I try some people just don't appreciate me
___ B. People appreciate the effort I put into my activities.

9. ___ A. Many times job assignments tend to be so unrelated to training that preparation is really useless.
 ___ B. I always look at how what I do at work fits into the "Big Picture"
10. ___ A. Without the right breaks one cannot be an effective leader.
 ___ B. An effective leader is organized, time oriented and good communicator.
11. ___ A. Whether I get ahead in life depends mostly on my ability.
 ___ B. I have little control over what happens to me in life.
12. ___ A. I feel any success in my life is basically a matter of luck.
 ___ B. Success in life is attributed to hard work and acceptance of challenges.

PART 2

The RIGHT side of this part of the survey contains statements which describe persuasive messages commonly used in television commercials. The LEFT side of this part of the survey contains four types of products commonly advertised on television. These products are: (a) food and drink, (b) household appliances, (c) medicine, and (d) personal care and fashion. Think of television commercials you have viewed in the last month for these type of products. Read each of the following statements and indicate the degree to which the commercial used that message for each type of product using the following response numbers: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. For example, if you agree with statement 13 regarding the message depicted in a food and drink commercial you would place a 4 after the statement under column A.

	Product	A	B	C	D
13.	The commercial suggest you will receive something in exchange for purchasing the product.	___	___	___	___
14.	The commercial suggest that something you will not like will happen if you do not adopt the product.	___	___	___	___
15.	The commercial is very positive and pleasant .	___	___	___	___
16.	The commercial promises something you want before asking you to purchase the product	___	___	___	___
17.	The commercial attempts to threaten or pressure you into making a product purchase.	___	___	___	___
18.	The commercial stresses the moral value of the product	___	___	___	___
19.	The commercial suggest you will good about yourself if you purchase the product.	___	___	___	___
20.	The commercial suggest that since the product has certain qualities you should want to purchase it.	___	___	___	___

1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=undecided, 4=agree, 5= strongly agree

	Product	A	B	C	D
21.	The commercial suggest the product needs your purchasing support very badly.	—	—	—	—
22.	The commercial suggest other individuals you value will think highly of you if you own this product.	—	—	—	—
23.	The commercial suggest other individuals you value will think less of you if you don't own this product.	—	—	—	—
24.	The commercial offered reasons for why you should purchase the product.	—	—	—	—
25.	The commercial suggest that the product has been successful in the past.	—	—	—	—
26.	The commercial points out that if you don't purchase the product you will miss a wonderful opportunity.	—	—	—	—
27.	The commercial offers expert opinions from credible individuals.	—	—	—	—
28.	The commercial attempts to entice you with the idea that by purchasing the product others will be very satisfied.	—	—	—	—

APPENDIX B
DEFINITIONS OF COMMERCIAL
INFLUENCE TACTICS

- Threat - Commercial's proposed request will have negative consequences in the future for the target if he or she does not comply.
- Liking - Commercial agent is friendly in order to put target in a good mood prior to seeking compliance.
- Pregiving - Commercial gives something to target prior to seeking compliance.
- Aversive Stimulation - Commercial continually punishes the target until the person complies.
- Debt - Commercial tells target compliance is owed due to past obligations.
- Moral Appeal - Commercial tells target that a moral person would comply.
- Positive Self-Feeling - Commercial suggest target's compliance will enhance his/her good feeling about him/herself.
- Altruism - Commercial stipulates some need the agent has which the target is requested to fulfill as a favor.
- Positive Esteem - Commercial informs target that compliance will be rewarded with respect from others.
- Negative Esteem - Commercial informs target that noncompliance will be punished with scorn from others.
- Altercasting - Commercial informs target that only an individual with poor qualities would not comply.
- Direct Request - Commercial asks target to comply
- Positive Expertise - Commercial informs target that based on experience, target will be rewarded if complies
- Negative Expertise - Commercial informs target that based on experience, things will get worse if target doesn't comply.

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